

IPLA

Indiana Principal Leadership Academy
A division of the Indiana Department of Education

SPECIAL EDITION

INSIDE

This edition of IPLA Special Edition is dedicated to the subject of professional learning communities. Methods and strategies for developing a professional learning community are shared by distinguished executive school leaders in this issue.

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Professional Learning Communities at Work

By Dr. Rick DuFour, Author and Superintendent
Adlai Stevenson High School, District 125 in Lincolnshire, Illinois

The most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is developing the ability of school personnel to function as professional learning communities.

Each word of the phrase “professional learning community” has been chosen purposely. A “professional” is someone with expertise in a specialized field, an individual who has not only pursued advanced training to enter the field, but who is also expected to remain current in its evolving knowledge base. The knowledge base of education has expanded dramatically in the past quarter century, both in terms of research and in terms of the articulation of recommended standards for the profession. Although many school personnel are unaware of or are inattentive to emerging research and standards, educators in a professional learning community make these findings the basis of their collaborative investigation of how they can better achieve their goals.

“Learning” suggests ongoing action and perpetual curiosity. In Chinese, the term “learning” is represented by two characters: the first means “to study,” and the second means “to practice constantly.” Many schools operate as though their personnel know everything they will ever need to know the day they enter the profession. The school that operates as a professional learning community recognizes that its members must engage in the ongoing study and constant practice that characterize an organization committed to continuous improvement.

Much has been written about learning organizations, but I prefer the term “community.” An organization has been defined both as an “administrative and functional structure” (Webster’s Dictionary) and as “a systematic arrangement for a definite purpose” (Oxford Dictionary). In each case, the emphasis is on structure and efficiency. In contrast, however, the term “community” suggests a group linked by common interests. As Connie McLaughlin and Gordon Davidson (1994) write: *Community means different things to different people. To some it is a safe haven where survival is assured through mutual cooperation. To others, it is a place of emotional support, with deep sharing and bonding with close friends. Some see community as an intense crucible for personal growth. For others, it is simply a place to pioneer their dreams. (p.471)*

In a professional learning community, all of these characteristics are evident. Educators create an environment that fosters mutual cooperation, emotional support, and personal growth as they work together to achieve what they cannot accomplish alone.

Information contained in this article was taken, with permission by Rick DuFour, from the introduction of Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement. 1998, National Education Service



Award Winner

**IPLA Special Edition
Recipient of National Staff
Development Council’s
Outstanding Staff Development
Newsletter Award for 2001!**



The Role of the Principal in a Professional Learning Community

By Andy Glentzer, Principal
Hartford City Middle School, IPLA Group #18

Creating a professional learning community must be a collective effort that cannot be accomplished without effective leadership from the school principal. In the past, an autocratic approach with a strong, forceful, assertive principal defined an “effective school.” Phrases like “running a tight ship” and “my way or the highway” placed the principal squarely in the driver’s seat of the school. This approach assumed that the best way was the leader’s way and that the leader knew more about everything than anyone else in the group. All decisions were in a top-down mode. The success of the school was a direct outcome of the principal’s areas of strength.

Presently the best research shows a principal as a leader that leads from the middle. Principals must apply their new role to a professional learning community where the principal is there to help and support teachers. This allows teachers to collaborate on their effectiveness. The principal facilitates consensus in the development of shared visions and values among the professional community. The principal must make a conscious effort to involve faculty members in decision-making and, almost more importantly, empower individuals to do their job. Principals must also create credibility by modeling the vision and values defined by their professional community.

The goals that the principal of a learning community should strive to attain are not simple. The following ideas may help define the needed leadership style:

- The principal must be more focused on results instead of procedure.
- The principal must continually communicate the vision, values, and goals of the school with the entire school community.
- The principal must empower collaborative teams that constantly reflect, plan, experiment, adapt, and analyze.
- The principal also needs to shape the school culture to support the learning community.
- The principal should focus on learning, not necessarily teaching.
- The principal must be credible and deliver on promises.
- The effective principal must also instill and continually foster the idea that teachers are leaders themselves.
- The principal must realize that continual improvement requires continual learning from the entire learning community.

Past images of strong, assertive principals cannot be supported in effective schools research. Principals cannot redesign their school through their individual efforts. Today’s research promises that principals who can work collaboratively with their learning community will build far more effective schools. Developing a professional learning community is a collective effort that cannot work without effective leadership from the school’s principal.



Creating a Professional Learning Community

By Kathy Cox, Principal
George Earle Elementary School
IPLA Group #31

United we stand, divided we fall! A school community will thrive and continually seek to improve when all the stakeholders are “singing off the same page.” Everyone must understand and believe in the school’s focus for educating children. Establishing common ground is essential and P.L. 221 is the foundation. By creating a professional learning community, educators focus on student/school improvement and build collegiality.

In their book, *Professional Learning Communities at Work*, Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker define four building blocks or pillars that support the school and give direction to the people within it. Each of these building blocks take its shape and form from the answer to a specific question addressed to the members of a school community. They state that if all members take the time to consider the questions, engage in deep discourse about them, and reach consensus on how the questions are to be answered, the foundation of a learning community will be established. Much work will remain, but the reconstruction work will have the benefit of a solid foundation.

The First Building Block: Mission/Purpose

Why do we exist? The mission question challenges members of a group to reflect on the fundamental purpose of the organization, the very reason for its existence.

The Second Building Block: Vision

What do we hope to become? Vision instills an organization with a sense of direction. A collective vision is important in the establishment of a learning organization.

The Third Building Block: Values

How must we behave in order to make our shared vision a reality? A statement of core values challenges the members to identify the specific attitudes, behaviors, and commitments they must demonstrate in order to advance toward their vision.

The Fourth Building Block: Goals

Which steps will we take first, and when? Establishing goals and priorities determines what must be accomplished first, the specific steps to achieve the objectives, and the timeline for the process. Goals represent measurable milestones to assess progress in advancing toward a vision; they make visions more substantive.

Is there a road map that will guide you on this journey? There are excellent books and journal/articles that address the topic of creating a professional learning community. I believe that the process is the process. Seek out, search, and discover the right direction for your school. Be ready to evoke emotions and passions. Educators want to make a positive difference for students.



Sustaining the School Improvement Process in a Professional Learning Community

By Larry Norris, Principal
John W. Kendall Elementary School, IPLA Group #22

Public Law 221 is very clear in its charge regarding school improvement plans. To be effective they must be working documents, serving as the blueprints for continuous growth in Indiana schools. The question at hand is, "How can principals best meet this challenge?" Let's fall back on the components of the IPLA experience.

Culture sessions provided us the foundation to make P.L. 221 work. A school improvement plan is not an assignment with a due date. It is not a report to meet a new state requirement. Instead, the plan gives us either a reason to celebrate the strong culture in our school that encourages change for continuous improvement or it will create the first brick in a culture wall that will become the foundation of an improving school.

Communication sessions provided the tools to sustain school improvement. As we all learned through IPLA, we must "walk our talk." DuFour and Eaker state that, "Volumes of philosophy statements, strategic plans, and long-range goals have been written by school districts, only to end up gathering dust as educators continue with business as usual." According to information in Professional Learning Communities, eight communication points are needed to sustain an effective learning community:

- *What do we plan for?* This area is critical. When a staff develops and shares a school plan with a community, it is telling everyone the driving forces that will create school growth.
- *What do we monitor?* This is where improvement plans fail. Inattention, lack of assessment, or failure to assess the right things lead to a school improvement plan that is not successful.
- *What questions do we ask?* The answer to this question carries only one correct answer. We must constantly question the status quo as it pertains to student achievement.
- *What do we model?* To quote Ralph Waldo Emerson, "What you do thunders above you so loudly all the while, I cannot hear what you say." In other words, we must be willing to model the changes we are communicating to our public.
- *How do we allocate our time?* Quite simply, the time we devote to an issue on a regular basis will let our public know what we really value.
- *What do we celebrate?* Do not bypass this important area. Celebrating goal accomplishments with a staff or a community reinforces the importance of that goal.
- *What are we willing to confront?* There will be challenges to our vision and values. The principal must be especially strong in displaying leadership that leads a school through these challenges, whether it be with students, staff, or community.

- *Keep it simple.* This final step should not be overlooked. An effective school improvement plan must be clear in its focus and repetitive in its presentation. Sharing a plan with the public means making it understandable to all who hear.

Collaboration - A staff cannot work successfully as a group of individual practitioners. They must work as a team of specialists. As the instructional leader, the principal's challenge is to create and facilitate a collaborative structure within the learning community. Collaboration is important because it:

- provides time for the sharing of ideas and strategies.
- fosters better decision making and ownership of decisions.
- helps reduce the fear of risk-taking.
- increases achievement gains as well as confidence among all members of the school community.
- reinforces changes in the school culture and commitment to improvement.

In closing, I would challenge principals to lean upon each other as they lead their school through development of the School Improvement Plan. Visit the IPLA website, contact colleagues from IPLA Groups, make plans to attend this year's winter conference, and never forget that IPLA graduates are a part of the most practical and beneficial leadership program in the country.

REGISTER TODAY

IPLA ALUMNI WINTER CONFERENCE

January 28-29, 2002

Sheraton Indianapolis Hotel and Suites

Indianapolis, Indiana



Rick DuFour

*The Leader's Role in Developing
a Collaborative Culture.*



Michael Fullan

Leading in a Culture of Change

"Early Bird Special" Registration - \$110.00
(Registration received on or before December 1, 2001)

Regular Registration - \$125.00
(Registration received after December 1, 2001)

Registration deadline is January 8, 2002.

Registration forms can be obtained at
www.doe.state.in.us/ipla



Professional Development: A Recipe for Success

*By Eileen Baker, Principal
Richmond High School
IPLA Group #21*

PICTURE THIS... schools where teachers and administrators comb the halls and teachers' lounges searching for a colleague who will listen while they share a new idea for teaching or enhancing learning instead of complaining about student apathy. A school where the faculty meeting begins with colleagues sharing about teaching and learning and ends with the staff enthusiastically setting out to find more information, instead of rehashing and reacting to the same old eternal issues, is a change in culture that can and will happen if we conscientiously promote sustained opportunities for professional development.

The bonds we share with one another and our attitudes about learning, sharing, and doing can make a big difference. Just as realtors stress location, location, location!; professional educators must stress relationship, relationship, relationship!, if we want to produce a recipe for success for professional development. What are the ingredients?

- One or two school leaders (teachers or administrators) who are learners, readers, researchers, and cheerleaders with a heaping dose of enthusiasm in place of "omni-competence", a word that says it all. (Lucianne Carmichael, Harvard University Principal Center.)
- Two or more compassionate and respectful but unabashed, vocal, inquisitive, and positive classroom teachers who exhibit an unquenchable thirst for finding a common but better route to student achievement.
- A perpetual gallon of trust, acceptance, and capacity to listen and not judge, encourage and not stifle.
- Extended time, seasoned with uninterrupted 1-2 hour sessions on an established weekly or monthly timeline, with reasonable deadlines for reading or gathering information on a predetermined topic.

- Current and reliable resources: tidbits and morsels (magazine articles, data, etc.) eventually graduated to more super-sized portions (research papers, books).
- Huge helpings of rethinking, feedback, tinkering, and reality checks, sifted gently during discussion and marinated for reconsideration.
- A physical environment of great comfort including delectable food, comfortable chairs, adequate lighting and fresh air, fun, and fellowship.

Mix these ingredients thoroughly to produce the heart of productive professional development - classroom applications that produce enhanced teaching and greater student learning and achievement.

When will we learn that "sit and get" works no better for educators than it does for our students? If we want learning to stick to our ribs, we must provide professional development which answers the question "so what?" We must extract from theory the ingredients we can use to increase understanding. We must learn, share, and apply. With the onset of P.L. 221, this outcome is critical!

ALUMNI NEWS

IPLA Alumni Scholarship Opportunity



The Indiana Principal Leadership Academy is proud to announce that it is time to recruit candidates for the 2002 IPLA Alumni Aspiring Principal Scholarships! Applications will be accepted from March 1, 2002 through May 1, 2002. Interviews will occur in June of 2002. Applications will be available on the IPLA web site at www.doe.state.in.us/ipla in February 2002.

Scholarship recipients will receive an award up to \$2,500 within a two-year period of time to be used toward tuition and textbook costs related to participation in an administrative preparation program.

Candidates should:

Currently be employed in an Indiana public school. • Currently be enrolled in an accredited administration program. • Value on-going professional development. • Possess a strong desire to become a public school administrator.



Curricular Focus in a Professional Learning Community

*By Barb Bergdoll, Principal
David Worth Dennis Middle School
IPLA Group #26*

In my past 25 plus years in education, I have been a part of the “merry-go-round” of educational methods/practices. We would all attend a workshop or hear a speaker and then run off to our classrooms to try these new methods. I don’t remember much about whether it was tied to our curriculum or if at any time there was mention about improving student achievement. Many of us never shared what we were teaching, how we taught it, or even if it was successful in the classroom. We thought those were the “good ole days” of education.

Now in the 21st century, student achievement and continuous improvement become the focus for all our schools. The most critical factor in achieving these two components is the focus on curriculum. It becomes the job of the principal to nurture a professional community of learners in our schools; to learn how to develop curriculum, relate it to the standards, and then tie it together with goals of the school and district.

How do we get started, where can we find the answers to our questions, and will it relate to P.L. 221? I am afraid that this time there are no “canned” plans that can be purchased. According to DuFour and Eaker, there are some components to help guide principals in curriculum development which focus on five important assumptions:

- Teachers should work collaboratively to design a research-based curriculum that reflects the best thinking in each subject area.
- The curriculum should help teachers, students, and parents clarify the specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions that students should acquire as a result of their schooling.
- The results-oriented curriculum should reduce content and enable all parties to focus on essential and significant learning.
- The curriculum process should enable an individual teacher, a teaching team, and the school to monitor student achievement at the classroom level.
- Curriculum and assessment processes should foster commitment to continuous improvement. (National Education Service, p. 155)

Along with these five assumptions comes change related to how curriculum is written, how goals, standards, and benchmarks are measured, what “not” to teach, and how is this all shared with our community and stakeholders. Teachers should have time allotted to share ideas, and to analyze and evaluate teaching units together. Professional development and curriculum development should be linked together so grade level teams or department teams clearly

understand what students should know and be able to do in their course or grade level and how students will demonstrate their mastery. That’s the easy part of the plan. How we implement the change will be the critical factor.

Alignment of the curriculum will be essential. Teachers will need to recognize and abandon that which does not relate to the curriculum or standards. Collaboration of teacher teams can assist in this process so that the individual teacher will follow in the established expectation of best practice and providing students with the skills they will need to demonstrate during assessment.

Making goal statements public is essential, but each teacher, parent, and student must have a better understanding of what the school stands for and the skills students are to acquire as the result of their learning. Many of our schools display our mission statements, but how many of us frame our curriculum goals for all to see? We can all do a better job in making sure that the curriculum serves as a constant reminder of how we will all achieve continuous improvement.

We no longer measure student achievement by how many students are promoted from one grade level to another, but how successful students are from kindergarten to the twelfth grade. Our focus must be on curriculum in order to ensure continuous improvement for our schools of the twenty-first century.

TECHNOLOGY TIP

Technology Standards for Administrators

The Collaborative for Technology Standards for School Administrators is currently working on standards for what administrators “should know about and be able to do to lead effective implementation of technology” in education.

This initiative, aimed at superintendents, principals, and district-level curriculum leaders, is still currently in a draft form.

To view the progress of the standards visit
www.cnets.iste.org/tssa

GREAT SITE

www.tutorlink.com

This site offers a complete operations and training program of tools, resources, technologies, and ideas that will guide your school through the development of an innovative and effective peer-tutoring program.



The Professional Learning Community: Moving Beyond Teachers Teaching and Students Learning

By Troy Watkins, Principal
Northeast Elementary School, IPLA Group #19

A traditional school believes that all students can learn. A professional learning community states specifically what a student will learn. A traditional school's vision is often a glorified wish list that is regularly ignored. A professional learning community's vision is a research-based roadmap for improvement. A traditional school often establishes excessive, random goals that are difficult to measure and often go unmonitored. The professional learning community creates a limited number of goals that are firmly established upon a common vision, frequently monitored, and easily measured by performance standards. Rick DuFour in an article featured in the Winter 2000-2001 issue of *The Leadership Academy Developer* suggests that there are six characteristics that separate a traditional school from a professional learning community.

Shared Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals

Teachers in a professional learning community understand that the ultimate purpose of a school is learning rather than teaching. One technique that can be effective for both the student learner and the teacher learner is journaling. Once teachers have created specific, measurable goals, journaling can be used to keep records, make observations, or to communicate with other staff members. Journal writing gives the learner an opportunity to reflect on activities, procedures, and assessments in the learning environment in order to maintain a constant focus on student learning.

Collective Inquiry

The professional learning community enables teachers to realize that the process of seeking answers is more significant than actually having the answer. Teachers can engage students in conversations about their school experiences. Teachers can ask structured questions of students in a variety of settings. When properly conducted, teachers can monitor their collaborative initiatives, check their teaching styles with student learning styles, and gauge how a student views school success.

Collaborative Teams

An organization that is truly a professional learning community utilizes collaborative teams to make schoolwide decisions that enhance student achievement. The collaborative endeavor of study groups allows the teacher teams to engage in collective learning. Carlene Murphey, a developmental specialist for ATLAS Communications identifies a seven step approach to study groups.

Step 1

Analyze data/indicators of student learning and/or the learning environment.

Step 2

Use the data to generate a list of student needs.

Step 3

Categorize and prioritize student needs.

Step 4

Organize study groups that focus on identified needs.

Step 5

Form action plans that include intended results and indicators of success.

Step 6

Implement, monitor, and modify the action plan.

Step 7

Evaluate the impact on student achievement.

Action Orientation and Experimentation

Action research is a method of making the vision of the learning community a reality. While the components of action research are similar to study groups, the process begins with the educators selecting a focus of research prior to collecting data. This willingness to explore new theories allows the members of the professional learning community to select an area to investigate, collect data, analyze and interpret the findings, and then take action of continuing, modifying, or concluding the initiatives.

Continuous Improvement

All members of the professional learning community are active participants whose focus must remain on the fundamental purpose of the organization. Systemically, the culture of the school continually seeks to develop strategies for improvement and assessments to measure their effectiveness. P.L. 221 is Indiana's initiative for schools in the state to involve all the participants in the learning community in the decision making process.

Results Orientation

Good intentions are not enough in a professional learning community. Teachers in learning communities are responsible for creating environments in which the student is encouraged and empowered to learn. The educational initiatives need to be evaluated based upon desired outcomes or standards. Random acts of school improvement are not enough to sustain improvement. Results must be assessed based upon student achievement rather than just feelings or emotions.



BOOKS FOR LEADERS

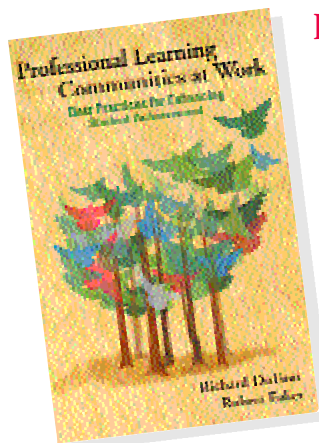
What's Worth Fighting for Out There

by Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan



"School people will find it a welcome companion on the path to progressive reform. Hopefully, parents, policy makers, and committed members of the public will learn that they can contribute to schools from this fresh and engaging look at what it will take to build a new system that succeeds with today's students for tomorrow's demands."

- from the Foreword
by Linda Darling-Hammond
Teachers College, Columbia University



Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement

by Rick DuFour and Robert Eaker

This publication presents research-based recommendations drawn from the best practices found today

in schools throughout the United States and Canada for continuously improving school performance. Coming from the perspectives of both a distinguished Dean of Education and one of America's most widely acclaimed practitioners, this publication provides specific, practical, and useful information needed to transform schools into results-oriented professional learning communities.

Where in the World is IPLA?



The Indiana Principal Leadership Academy has far reaching effects. How far, is the question. IPLA is nationally recognized for its efforts in the leadership field but now IPLA can be recognized for all to see. Have you seen IPLA somewhere in the world? If so, send us your photos today to Becca Lamon at IPLA, Department of Education, Room 229, State House, Indianapolis, Indiana 46204-2798.



IPLA reached new heights when Marilyn Sudsberry (Groups 18 & 23) hiked the Cascade Mountains in Oregon. In the middle of a snowstorm on July 31, Marilyn managed to keep warm with her IPLA sweatshirt. Marilyn is currently the principal at Towne Meadow Elementary in Carmel, Indiana.

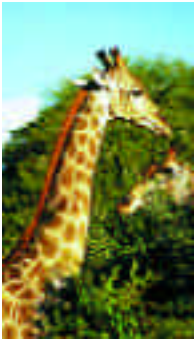


Rhonda Buzan (Group 4 and Facilitation Team leader) and her son, Greg, spent time together in Leadville, Colorado, earlier this year. Rhonda is currently the principal at Smoky Row Elementary in Carmel, Indiana.

QUOTE CORNER

“In short, nothing serves an organization better -- especially during these times of agonizing doubts and paralyzing ambiguities -- than leadership that knows what it wants, communicates those intentions accurately, empowers others and knows how to stay on course and when to change.”

Warren Bennis



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Nov. 13	IPLA Live! P.L. 221 - Mary Mickelson, IDOE
Nov. 13	Orientation Day (Group 37 & 38) Sheraton Indianapolis Hotel & Suites
Nov. 14-15	Academy Sessions (Groups 35, 36, 37 & 38) Sheraton Indianapolis Hotel & Suites
Nov. 16	Graduation (Group 36) Sheraton Indianapolis Hotel & Suites
Dec. 11	IPLA Live!
Jan. 8, 2002	IPLA Live!
Jan. 28-29, 2002	IPLA Alumni Winter Conference Sheraton Indianapolis Hotel & Suites
Feb. 12, 2002	IPLA Live!

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